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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the reactions to injustice between individuals as a function of the race and sex of the subject. Two contrasting hypotheses derived from research on altruism and personality differences indicate that white females/black males and white males/black females differ in their response to inequity. The study supports the hypothesis based on personality differences; that black females and white males take greater action to correct an inequity when compared to both white females and black males. The implications of these results are discussed. (Author)

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Sex, Race, and Reactions to Injustice

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the reactions to injustice between individuals as a function of the race and sex of the subject. Two contrasting hypotheses derived from research on altruism and personality differences indicated that white females/black males and white males/black females would differ in their response to inequity. The present study supported the hypothesis based on personality differences, in that black females and white males were found to take greater action to correct an inequity when compared to both white females and black males. The implications of these results are discussed.

Sex, Race, and Reactions to Injustice

Injustice has long been associated with race and sex. Most concern, however, has focused upon institutionalized inequities rather than those which often occur at the interpersonal level. Although organizations composed of persons of a particular race or sex (e.g., NAACP; NOW) have been created to change unfair systems, such groups might have little impact on the day-to-day inequities which occur between friends, acquaintances, and co-workers. Since these injustices must be corrected by the individuals involved, it is of interest to study individual differences which are related to reactions to injustice at the interpersonal level.

Adams (1964) has suggested a basis of determining when injustice occurs between individuals by proposing that when rewards are not distributed in proportion to each person's contributions to the relationship, the outcomes will be perceived as inequitable and unsatisfactory. In investigating behavioral reactions to an injustice based upon considerations of equity, past research has focused upon either situational variables (e.g., Leventhal, Weiss, & Long, 1969; Michelini & Messe', 1974) or the mode used to resolve the inequity (e.g., Lerner & Mathews, 1967; Ross, Thibaut, & Evenbeck, 1971). The present research, instead, examined the effects of individual differences -- those of race and sex -- on the response to inequity at the personal level.

No research has examined directly the relationship of both sex and race to personal reactions to injustice. A number of studies, however, have investigated sex and race effects on helping (e.g., Wegner & Crano, in press; West, Whitney, & Schnedler, 1975; Wispe' & Freshley, 1971), a behavior which may be related to reactions to inequity. Although the results of these studies appear to be inconclusive and often open to methodological criticisms, the study by

Wegner and Crano (in press) appears most suggestive since it attempted to resolve both of these problems. Their results showed that black males and white females were more likely to help another than were white males. Black females were intermediate but did not differ significantly from any of the groups. To the extent that helping behavior and reactions to injustice are positively related, this study indicates that black males and white females would be more likely to attempt to correct an injustice than white males and, perhaps, black females.

An examination of studies that have shown personality differences as a function of both race and sex, however, suggests an alternative set of hypotheses. First, black females have been found to be more internally controlled (White, 1971) and self-assured (Proshansky & Newton, 1969) than black males. Also black females have been found to be more self-accepting and confident than white females (Hodgkins & Stakenas, 1961). Finally, white males appear to be more assertive characteristically than white females (Maccoby, 1966). Such characteristics appear to be related to reactions to injustice (Aronoff, 1967; 1970). Therefore, these findings imply that both black females and white males would be more likely to correct an inequity than either white females or black males. This hypothesis is in contrast to that derived from the research of Wegner and Crano (in press). The present study, then, was designed to examine whether white females and black males are more or less likely to correct an injustice than are black females and white males.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were seventy-two volunteer students at a large upstate New York college. The sample consisted of twenty white females, twenty white-males,

seventeen black females, and fifteen black males. Subjects were obtained from introductory and advanced psychology classes and Afro-American classes.[2]

Materials and Procedure

Subjects were informed that they were participating in a study on attitudes among college students. They were instructed to read two short stories. One was about two male college students who were working jointly on a class project and the other concerned two waitresses who were required to pool their tips. Each story followed the format in which one of the individuals contributed little to the group outcome, thereby requiring the other to do additional work. In both stories, the two persons would no longer be working together because either the course was completed or the waitresses would be working different shifts. About the time each relationship ended, the person with inadequate contributions told the course professor or the employer that both worked hard and, therefore, should receive the same reward and that the policy of equal rewards for joint efforts should be continued. The person who contributed the greater share was then approached to confirm the other's statements.

Four questions followed each story. The first asked the subject to indicate how the person who contributed the greater share of work would respond to the professor or employer's query about the other's statements and the allocation of rewards. The four possible responses were essentially: 1) complete agreement with the other's statements, 2) both should receive equal rewards but that the policy should not continue, 3) the other notably contributed to the joint outcome but not sufficiently for an equal reward, and 4) the other contributed little or none and, therefore, should either not pass the course or be let go as a waitress. The other three questions were answered on seven-point scales.

Two of these questions dealt with the subject's perception of the extent to which the major contributor resented the other's contributions and statements to the professor or employer. The final question was concerned with the extent to which equal rewards were perceived as fair by the subject.

RESULTS

The responses to the first question for each story were used to indicate the subject's behavioral reactions to the described inequities. Since the four alternatives presented in Question 1 varied in the extent to which they were attempts to correct the inequity, they were ranked from one to four so that a value of one was given to the first alternative (saying nothing) and a value of four to the fourth alternative (telling the complete truth). Furthermore, since preliminary analyses found no significant race or sex interactions that included stories, all subsequent analysis were performed by adding the scores for each question across stories.

The hypothesis derived from research on helping (specifically, Wegner & Crano, in press) predicted that both white females and black males would be more likely to correct an injustice than would either black females or white males. In contrast, the research on personality differences suggested the opposite hypothesis. Since both state that white females and black males will differ from black females and white males, the appropriate analysis appeared to be to combine the respective groups and then compare them. Such an analysis was performed by use of a two-tailed t-test. In support of the hypothesis derived from research on personality differences, black females and white males were more likely to take greater steps to correct the inequities than were white females and black males, $t\ (70) = 2.237$; $p < .03$. The respective means

were 5.46 and 4.83. Also, t-tests performed between black males and white females and between black females and white males added further support by indicating no significant differences ($p > .05$).[2] A two by two (race by sex) analysis of variance on responses to the first question was used as an alternative method of data analysis. A significant race by sex interaction was found ($F = 6.010$, If 1, 68, $p < .05$). Further analysis of this interaction revealed a series of significant effects corresponding to those indicated by the t-tests. Black females ($\bar{x}=5.64$) differed significantly from black males ($\bar{x}=4.46$) ($F=8.78$, $p < .01$), white males ($\bar{x}=5.30$) significantly differed from black males ($\bar{x}=4.46$) ($F=4.39$, $p < .05$). White females ($\bar{x}=5.10$) took less to correct an injustice than either black females or white males, however, this difference was not significant.

It might be argued that black females and white males merely perceived the inequities as being more severe than did white females and black males and, therefore, reacted more strongly. To investigate this possibility, the appropriate t-tests were performed on the three questions which examined the subject's perception of the situation. However, none of the tests were significant ($p > .05$), thereby eliminating differences in standards of fairness or resentment as an explanation for the present results.

DISCUSSION

The results supported the position derived from research on personality differences that black females and white males would take greater action to correct an inequity than would both white females and black males. However, the specific personality variables that may mediate these effects must be delineated by future research. Such a study is desireable since the present

findings appear to have generality given that a similar response pattern was found when both the situation and the sex of the participants were varied in the two stories.

The results of this study, however, are discrepant with those found by Wegner and Crano (in press) for helping behavior. This suggests that retributive and altruistic behavior are not mediated by the same variables in the same way. For instance, those with a social orientation might be more likely to be altruistic since it facilitates interpersonal relations. This same orientation, however, might inhibit attempts to correct an inequity since such behavior would emphasize not only the existence of conflict in the relationship but also negative feelings. Some research has indicated that white females are more socially oriented than are white males (Maccoby, 1966). It is possible that the opposite is true for black females and black males. If so, this explanation might account for the differences in results for Wegner and Crano (in press) and the present study.

Also, research on helping behavior indicates that the sex and race of the subject and the other participants are related to the likelihood of helping (e.g., Wegner & Crano, in press; West, et al., 1975; Wispe' & Freshley, 1971). The present study only systematically examined the race and sex of the subject. Subsequent research should include a design in which the race and sex of the subject and the participants are systematically varied.

Finally, it was noted previously that several groups (e.g., NOW, NAACP) have become aware of institutionalized injustices against them. Some have organized themselves to correct or prevent these injustices. The present results suggest that this active attempt at the societal level may not have generalized completely to the interpersonal level for white females and, in particular,

black males. Such a conclusion would be tentative, of course, since it would be based only upon one study. If supported by further research, however, another negative consequence of sexual and racial discrimination might be demonstrated.

FOOTNOTES

1. The authors wishes to thank Drs. Steven Snodgrass and Ross Vasta for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Reprint requests should be directed to the third author in care of Department of Psychology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843.

2. All black students at this New York institution were enrolled in Afro-American courses.

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